



e-ISSN 2357-9854

WorldView: Intersecções Culturais em Arte Contemporânea

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RESUMO — WorldView: Intersecções Culturais em Arte Contemporânea — *WorldView: Intersecções Culturais em Arte Contemporânea* é um programa de aprendizagem que permite a alunos participarem em aprendizagem culturais globais através das artes. Cada ano, *WorldView* examina um tema novo de impacto social global e insere experiências com o trabalho de um artista contemporâneo como uma forma dos alunos acessarem e explorarem simultaneamente questões globais atuais e conceitos da arte contemporânea. Através de *WorldView*, alunos e educadores se engajam criativamente com questões sociais diferentes. Este artigo examinará os métodos e práticas do programa, apresentando *WorldView: Brazil*, uma colaboração programática do Wexner Centro das Artes. O programa *WorldView: Brazil* incorporou artes visuais e filmes brasileiros, centrando-se em *Cruzamentos: Arte Contemporânea no Brasil* (exibição), *Doméstica* (filme por Gabriel Mascaro), e *Wasteland* (filme por Lucy Walker). O programa criou uma experiência de aprendizado que integrou arte, cultura, identidade, estudos sociais, e humanidades.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Aprendizagem Global. Aprendizagem de Artes. Arte Contemporânea. Filme. Brasil.

ABSTRACT — WorldView: Cultural Intersections in Contemporary Art — *WorldView: Cultural Intersections in Contemporary Art* is an art education program that allows K-12 students to engage in global cultural learning through arts learning. Each year, *WorldView* examines a new theme with social impact around the globe, and inserts experience with work by a contemporary artist and study as a way for learners to access and explore both pertinent global issues and topical contemporary art. Through *WorldView*, learners and educators engage creatively with a different social issue each year. This article will examine the program's methods and practice, featuring *WorldView: Brazil*, a programmatic collaboration within the Wexner Center for the Arts. The *WorldView: Brazil* program incorporated Brazilian visual arts and film by centering on *Cruzamentos: Contemporary Art in Brazil* (exhibition), *Doméstica* (film by Gabriel Mascaro), and *Wasteland* (film by Lucy Walker). The program created a layered learning experience with art, culture, identity, social studies, and humanities.

KEYWORDS

Global Learning. Arts Learning. Contemporary Art. Film. Brazil.

There are few ways to get hundreds of students from different schools all together to take a trip, out of their communities, beyond themselves (and their devices), across the world, without passports and substantial resources. Even in the United States, so few K-12 students get robust exposure to global studies and geography, let alone access to international travel. Similarly, K-12 students also get very little exposure to arts learning. As an artist and educator, I created *WorldView* with all of those notions in mind and an objective to address two urgent and gaping holes in K-12 education: the arts and global studies.

WorldView: Cultural Intersections in Contemporary Art, is an art education program serving K-12 students in grades 8-12th. Developed in 2005 in the education program area at the Wexner Center for the Arts, located at the Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio, *WorldView* was a way to study and engage global cultural perspectives and experiences, and topics in contemporary life through the arts. The idea for the program ripened out of the premise that every thinking mind needs a worldview: a way to access identity and place, a pathway to uncover cultural reference and perspective, a flexible framework to examine global cultural curiosities and understandings. Each year, *WorldView*, a single-day educational convening, comparable to a summit or seminar, creates a space for K-12 learners and educators from different area schools to partner with each other and with the Wexner Center for the Arts, a multidisciplinary contemporary arts space presenting visual, film, and performing arts, to engage with contemporary art alongside socially relevant issues with global impact.

Figure 1: WorldView film screening



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WorldView makes it possible for hundreds of participants to intentionally wander to another part of the world to question and unpack complex issues while experiencing a work of art. The concept is inquiry-based, experiential, and multisensory, and allows K-12 audiences to collaborate with arts educators and programmers, in an arts

institution, to step outside of the prescribed and traditional learning space (Remer, 1996). However, in breaking from the tradition of sitting still in walls and similarity, encountering new ideas with the same people everyday, pressing for something different, means asking a series of intentional questions that guide the purpose and objectives of the program (Remer, 1996). Including, why examine a set of issues by looking at those issues from the lens of another country or cultural context? What medium could help us look at an issue globally and help us understand how that issue is nuanced and might also manifest locally? How might we understand global issues differently by looking at them through art? How would integrating art create new opportunities for learners and educators to engage compelling and contemporary global topics? How might we approach, understand complex issues differently through objects and media? These, and other such questions help define the programming objectives for *WorldView*; what we might experiment with from year to year, and what we might measure to determine efficacy. The following overarching questions and intentional elements are critical drivers that guide curricular and programmatic decisions each year.

To begin, we ask, what feels relevant or most pressing at the moment? What is happening around the world that we cannot stop thinking about? The research and curatorial period begins with reading, sharing ideas, watching many different films from all over the world, usually documentary films, discussing the content, filmmaking and filmmakers, and reading about the overarching themes. Selecting the film is one of the most critical points leading up to programming. Since *WorldView* is generally executed in one day, we have developed a responsive, critical, creative, and collaborative approach to how we curate the entire daylong experience around a film that has educational value, and feels interesting and compelling in the here and now. During research and program planning, I work and consult with a small team of curators, educators, researchers, and students. We collaborate in every aspect of programming, from concept to execution to evaluation.

In 2014, Brazil was hosting the World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympics were on the horizon. Brazil would host both; and was steeped in a media fueled international moment. The world was curious about Brazil. Coinciding with this expansive rising

curiosity, the Wexner Center was due to debut its own contribution to the conversation on Brazil with a center-wide *Via Brasil* initiative that included the exhibition *Cruzamentos: Contemporary Art in Brazil* and an accompanying contemporary film series. All of this research, discussion, and access to contemporary Brazil presented *WorldView* a ripe opportunity for programming.

As we prepped for the forthcoming *WorldView* program, it made sense to not only focus on Brazil; but to also inquire into how students were already engaging with the idea of Brazil from influence from popular culture. We engaged in discussion with K-12 educators and learned that while some students seemed to know that Brazil is a country and associated with Latin America, few students were able to identify Brazil on a map or speak to any cultural knowledge about the country. Beyond what students briefly encountered via popular culture, Brazil was still quite distant and unfamiliar to most students. Selecting Brazil as the point of engagement for *WorldView* offered students a long gaze at a country that they might not be able to identify on a map yet, but that they would continue to hear about over the course of the next few years in and out of popular culture and national and international media streams. For education programming at the Wexner Center in the area serving K-12 schools, the *Via Brasil* initiative was a timely moment, an exploratory opportunity to contribute a school-based offering to a wider institutional and cultural conversation. With extensive research and critical contemporary cultural findings, curators Bill Horrigan, Jennifer Lange, and Chris Stults, in partnership with Brazilian curator Paulo Venancio Filho, offered a rich foundation, literally a new look at Brazil, from which to build an extended K-12 education program, a robust and multidisciplinary offering of film and visual arts. *WorldView: Brazil* included two widely different contemporary documentary films, teaching and learning resources, including arts learning, geographic details and social studies components, and guided gallery learning in the exhibition *Cruzamentos: Contemporary Art in Brazil*. Now that there was a distinct K-12 education programming opportunity within the wider *Via Brasil* initiative, next step was identifying two engaging films with imagery and content fit for a high school audience.

“My students are still talking about their [*WorldView*] experiences from previous years. They do not forget those experiences,” said one of our education partners, a

social anthropology teacher from one of the local public schools that participates in *WorldView* every year. Often by the time many of her students complete four years of high school, many have participated in *WorldView* multiple times, which translates to these students examining contemporary social issues from at least four different parts of the world and from multiple creative angles with a diverse group of peers from varying demographic areas across central Ohio.

This is another element important to *WorldView*, gathering different kinds of learners and their vast lived experience for a shared arts-integrated learning opportunity. There are few ways to collectively situate different kinds of learners in a traditional K-12 classroom. The museum offers a space to gather for arts-integrated educational engagement. *WorldView* offers students a variation of *situated learning*, or learning in a community of practice where participants gather to learn and construct meaning, where Jean Lave, social anthropologist, suggests “that learning, thinking, and knowing are relations among people engaged in activity *in, with and arising from the socially and culturally structured world.*” (Lave, 1991, p. 67, emphasis added)

Figure 2: WorldView post-film discussion



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Contemporary artists are often noticing, documenting what is happening in the world up close and at a distance, both now and historically, a creative telling of

observations and truths, a collection of sensory details through a variety of mediums. Which calls into question one of the ultimate considerations of WorldView programming: what is the appropriate medium at the center of the learning experience? During most program years, *WorldView* employs film as its experiential medium. Film is often accessible in varying formats, and is an engaging medium for learners. Additionally, students are readily consuming all kinds of media on various tech devices. Which drives the question, why create an arts education program that uses a medium that is already such an accessible conduit for consumption? Additionally, why have educators and students take a fieldtrip to a museum to view a film they can potentially watch in their own classroom at school? Paula Rosenblum writes, “Popular art,” such as film, “is of relevance to students, allows students to talk about emotionally meaningful concerns, aids in the student’s understanding of [their] culture as well as the cultures of other peoples, and provides materials of great social relevance” (Rosenblum, 1981, p. 11). Rosenblum suggests, “group experiences” like cinema create collective cultural experience and reveals variance in pathways to learning and knowing that the isolation of self-study lacks. I would further suggest that collective experience offers the learning space access to diverse perspectives, a learning landscape with myriad points of view, and assorted entry points into thinking, experience, and the educational intersection with the art. This kind of an arts-integrated learning environment is of value to both educators and learners as it provides an experience not often accessible in the school environment, a rich context for sensory input and output, multiple paths to understanding a text, a wide range of experiential contributions, and a disruption of homogeneity. Rosenblum also suggests that mediums like film tell us something particular and distinct about what it is to *be alive*. In other words, watching a film in a theater collects humans in a space to experience something together, in this case exchanging not only teaching and learning, but also being.

Figure 3: Q&A with student participant and Dr. Flávia Bastos



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While the medium central to the format and educational programming for *WorldView* is film, it is specifically documentary film that pushes participants beyond aesthetics to contemplate content. As I alluded to earlier, gathering a few hundred students in front of an international documentary film is an innovative and efficient method of finding place and people beyond what we already think we know, what we have experienced. A way to both move beyond ourselves to learn something new about others by way of taking in something new ourselves. Chris Stults, one of the film curators at the Wexner Center for the Arts, and the curator behind the *Cruzamentos: Contemporary Brazilian Documentary Series*, the media arts extension of *Via Brasil*, wrote, “To document the world is to present a portrait of one’s self and one’s encounter with the world. The self is nothing without constant engagement with the world, with the other” (STULTS, 2014, p. 163). I will further add, to learn and experience from what is documented of the world is to encounter the world beyond the self, to see the world through many selves, to discover imagery, people, and narratives. Documentary film is a cultural journey.

WorldView centered the exhibition *Cruzamentos: Contemporary Art in Brazil*, and accompanying films, *Doméstica* by Gabriel Mascaro and *Wasteland* by Lucy

Walker incorporating two areas of arts learning, visual arts and media arts. Programming created a layered and interdisciplinary context for learners to study the arts, culture, identity, social studies and humanities. The exhibition *Cruzamentos: Contemporary Art in Brazil*, featured 35 contemporary Brazilian artists, practitioners of myriad artistic practices including “painting, site-specific installation, photography, sculpture and moving image works” (HORRIGAN, VERNANCIO, LANGE, TEJO, & STULTS, 2014). What was compelling about this gathering of both emerging and midcareer artists was how the range of their work reflected a very present Brazil thrust into a global moment and looking to a rapidly developing future with a sense of urgency, evolution and a long cultural tradition of improvisation. Brazil was, is a country emerging and responding to its newfound presence on a dynamic global stage. The exhibition was the perfect complement to *WorldView: Brazil* as it offered students a wider scope of new works, an important and reflective mix of culture, ethnicity, and experience in Brazil.

In addition to the exhibition, we selected *Doméstica* and *Wasteland*. Both had compelling, engaging narratives, and educational content appropriate for secondary students. The films complimented each other in surprising ways and there was a thematic thread that ran through both films and connected at various points to *Cruzamentos*. Both documentary films presented the opportunity to explore social constructs and perception from different points of view, especially as American students compared Brazil’s social constructs to their own experiences with the socio-economic construct here in the United States. Other issues explored in *WorldView: Brazil* programming included matters of ecology, identity, narrative, history, geography, and public/private space. We presented both films, and included gallery learning and tours of the visual arts exhibition. In all, students had the opportunity to see myriad representations of identity through cultural references, art objects, and imagery, collectively, a multisensory arts and culture integrated educational experience.

Figure 4: WorldView panel discussion with Dr. Flávia Bastos, Jaime Bennati, and Aparna Dial



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Figure 5: WorldView learning resources



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Central to *WorldView* is providing a platform for discussion throughout programming. We accomplish this in a few different ways. We create teaching and learning resources for that year's specific program with multiple access points for engaging with the film and its content. We provide a speaker or panel, who can help teachers and learners explore different perspectives and varying angles of a film's

content. Partnership is a key element to programming, and for *WorldView: Brazil*, ideally we wanted a facilitator or speaker who was a native of Brazil or scholar studying the country and culture, and could bring an authentic and personal perspective for teachers and learners. We worked with visual art educator and scholar Dr. Flávia Cunha Bastos, from the University of Cincinnati School of Art. Dr. Bastos, a native of Brazil and an art educator made her an ideal facilitator, one with an authentic voice with lived experience, a personal perspective paired with her knowledge and scholarship as an art educator. Her nuanced expertise, enhanced how we could deepen our teaching with the two chosen films and the art objects in the exhibition; as well as enriched how we engaged in substantive cross-cultural discussion with *WorldView* participants. This kind of multicultural arts programming provided an inclusive and more “expansive conception of art education” (BERSSON, 1986, p. 45). Dr. Bastos’ authentic culturally informed voice and experience helped us think comprehensively about programming including teaching and learning resources, questions to ask the artwork and ourselves, and how to help participants situate themselves to actively engage in this arts-integrated cross-cultural experience.

At the heart of *WorldView* is the film programming. *Wasteland*, a film by Lucy Walker was the first film participants screened. The film, set just outside of Rio de Janeiro, took viewers inside the world’s largest landfill, *Jardim Gramacho*, to highlight the lives of the “catadores,” people working in the landfill to extract recyclable or reusable materials as a way to generate income. The documentary film chronicles artist Vik Muniz as he features some of the “catadores,” in portraits patterned after the posturing and gestures of well-known classical art historical paintings —the portraits of the “catadores” made from the very landfill materials they extract from the earth everyday. After screening the film, we began a conversation that would stretch into the following week with the screening of *Doméstica*, a thread of discourse woven with students thinking critically about humanity, dignity, poverty, socio-economics, class systems, and ecology. *Wasteland* particularly deals with how we think about value: value of art, of materials, of human beings. We worked with Dr. Flávia Bastos, alongside a panel including artist and educator, Jaime Bennati, and civil and environmental engineer, Aparna Dial, as they helped *WorldView* participants uncover

the issues and relate them to their own lives. The panel reinforced close analysis, critical thinking about imagery, content, and the depth and complexity of global matters.

Gabriel Mascaro's *Doméstica* (Housemaids), as curator Chris Stults puts it, is a "case study" for challenging conventional ways of filmmaking. In the context of *WorldView*, it is also a study of what else film can be: the center of a shared learning experience, a distant gaze up close, a visual notion, a multisensory inquiry, a creative way to communicate. There was a lot for *WorldView* to learn from Mascaro's *Doméstica*. A lot for students to grapple with, including socio-cultural issues, history and ideas of modernity, identity, and art making. Mascaro collaborated with youths, amateurs, to make a revealing film about issues students do not often get the opportunity to think about or discuss in school: class structure, ideas around the domestic space and those who inhabit that space, interpersonal and the public parts of people's lives, economics, and social systems. In a conversation between Dr. Flavia Bastos and Gabriel Mascaro, a dialogue interwoven with Portuguese and English, in-person and overseas via a visual *Skype* feed, we asked questions about the subjects of the film, their lives, our lives, identities, and experiences. In the end, both films and the exhibition were opportunities for participants to see, hear, more narratives from Brazil, and to discuss those narratives in real time with artists, educators, and peers, then take that back to the classroom to think and discuss further. Both films and the exhibition were opportunities for participants to see, hear, more narratives from Brazil, and to discuss those narratives in real time with artists, educators, peers, then take that back to the classroom to think and discuss further.

Figure 6: “Working Lunch”: WorldView Roundtable Discussions



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In *WorldView* participants learn about themselves, and others, by looking at, thinking about, discussing art, together. When students learn about the cultural and social contexts of art works, they in turn develop more understanding for what it means to be human and culturally complex (GAUDELIUS & SPEIRS, 2002). In *WorldView*, participants hold space and a long gaze; enter into the quiet intimate parts of humanity, a wide swathe of culture and diaspora, the similar and difference of the human experience. *WorldView* centers art and helps participants move beyond stationary learning, complacency, familiar surroundings and communities, assumptions about others, ourselves, to interrogate what we think we know, bringing us together to notice and discuss the similar and difference, to share an experience, to learn.

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Recebido em 12 de novembro de 2018

Aceito em 5 de dezembro de 2018